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ABSTRACT

In order to compare methods of instructing Spanish-speaking children in oral English, 11 children were randomly assigned to the control group--instruction conducted in English using the Peabody Development Kit (PDK)--while 12 children were assigned to the experimental group--bilingual instruction using the PDK. At the outset, all children were reading English at least one grade level below grade placement, were experiencing difficulty in speaking fluently in English, came from homes where Spanish was the dominant language, and had similar English syntactical performance. The pretest and posttest sequence measured English morphology and syntax. Results of the posttests supported the null hypothesis--that there would be no significant difference in morphological development. Tape-recorded samples of oral language (the children telling stories) showed that the control group gained two more T-units than did the experimental group but that the control group remained static in the number of words used per T-unit, while the experimental group increased by two words. (The hypothesis for syntax could not be accepted or rejected.) (JM)

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THE ORAL ENGLISH OF MEXICAN AMERICAN SPANISH-SPEAKING STUDENTS IN A MONOLINGUAL AND BILINGUAL SCHOOL SETTING: AN ANALYSIS OF SYNTACTIC AND MORPHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

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June 1975

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THE ORAL ENGLISH OF MEXICAN AMERICAN SPANISH-SPEAKING STUDENTS IN A MONOLINGUAL AND BILINGUAL SCHOOL SETTING: AN ANALYSIS OF SYNTACTIC AND MORPHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Recently much concern has emerged about the educational problems of cultural groups that are different from middle-class America. Among these cultural groups are the Mexican Americans.

U.S. census figures from 1960 have shown the adult Mexican American averaging only 7.1 years of schooling. Arturo Gutierrez, in a presentation at a reading conference in Laredo, Texas, stated that there were approximately 625,000 Spanish-surnamed children in Texas. Over one-third of these youngsters showed a limited ability to speak and to understand English in grades K-12. Gutierrez also mentioned that Texas Education Agency statistics for 1973 indicated that 14 percent of the Mexican American students dropped out of school by the eighth grade and only 55 percent entered the twelth grade.

In an attempt to study closer the Mexican American child's language and to determine whether certain procedures and programs might help him develop his English oral language adequately, the present study was undertaken. This investigation proposed to compare the effects of using the Peabody Language Development Kit -- Level 3 on the English morphological and syntactical structures of a group of Mexican American fourth and fifth grade students instructed bilingually in English and Spanish and another group instructed only in English.

The null hypothesis tested was that there would be no significant difference in the development of English morphology (word structure) and syntax (word order) between those Spanish-speaking children exposed to daily bilingual lessons in oral language and those instructed unilingually in English using the same lessons. Additionally, the research hypothesis

stated that if there would be any difference, the pupils schooled bilingually would demonstrate greater morphological and syntactical development in their speech.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This investigation was conducted at Nye Elementary School in the United Independent School District in Laredo, Texas from November 15, 1974 to April 15, 1975.

The twenty-three subjects participating in the study came from low to upper-middle income families. Eight males and four females comprised the group instructed bilingually, whereas the group instructed only in English was composed of seven boys and four girls. All of the students had to meet the following criteria:

a) Be reading in English at least one grade level below grade placement as measured by informal reading inventories,

b) Be experiencing difficulty in expressing themselves fluently in the English language, (This judgment was based on informal classroom observations.)

c) Have Spanish as their native language, and

d) Come from a home where Spanish was the dominant language spoken.

The children were randomly assigned to either the control group (Peabody Language Development Kit, PLDK, all-English instruction) or to the experimental group (PLDK bilingual instruction). Treatment was randomly assigned. Both classes were conducted daily during a 30-minute session for each group. The sessions were held in the morning and the time slots for each group were randomly assigned.

The lessons were taught according to the directions stated in the PLDK manual. The classes were conducted totally in English with the English group and in a bilingual manner with the experimental group. In the experimental group, ideas were first presented in Spanish and immediately reinforced

in English.

As an indicator of morphological development, the Dos Amigos Verbal Language Scales were administered on a pre-posttest sequence. Indications of syntactic development were provided by the number of T-Units and by the number of words per T-Unit each group obtained on the oral language samples. (A T-Unit, or Minimal Terminal Unit, is considered to be one clause plus any subordinate clause or nonclausal structure attached to it (Hunt, 1965).

The oral language tapings were obtained in November 1974 and in April 1975. Immediately after viewing a picture, the investigator recorded the verbal story each child told about the action depicted. The subject was allowed to view the picture while telling his story. Exact transcripts of each student's story were made.

At the outset of the investigation, both the bilingually-instructed and the English-instructed groups had similar syntactical performance. The former obtained an average of six T-Units and seven words per T-Unit, while the group taught in English produced a mean of seven T-Units and eight words per T-Unit. The pre-test data also indicated that on the Dos Amigos both groups had similar morphological performance, as defined in this study. The bilingually-instructed group achieved at the 39th percentile, while the group instructed in English performed at the 38th percentile.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In comparing the posttest performance of both groups on the Dos Amigos, the English-taught group obtained a median percentile score of 56, while the group taught bilingually achieved at the 55th percentile (see Table 1). Based on this information, the hypothesis that there would be no significant difference between the English-instructed and the bilingually-instructed groups in morphological development (as defined in this

investigation) was accepted.

Table 1 Hypothesis to Morphology

Group Instructed Bilingually	Pre -- 39	Post -- 55
Group Instructed in English	Pre -- 38	Post -- 56

In addition to analyzing the data provided by the Dos Amigos, the oral language samples of the recorded stories were also evaluated. The English-instructed group gained two more T-Units (see Table 2A) than the bilingually-instructed group. The English-taught group remained static in the number of words used per T-Unit from pre-to-posttesting, while the group taught bilingually increased in this category by two words (see Table 2B). Since these findings do not definitely favor either group, the hypothesis for syntax could not be clearly accepted or rejected.

Hypothesis Regarding Syntax

Table 2A Total No. of T-Units

	Total No. of T-Units		Gain	Difference
Group Instructed Bilingually	Pre: 6	Post: 11	5	2
Group Instructed in English	Pre: 7	Post: 14	7	

Table 2B Mean No. of Words Per T-Unit

	Mean No. of Words Per T-Unit		Gain	Difference
Group Instructed Bilingually	Pre: 7	Post: 9	2	2
Group Instructed in English	Pre: 8	Post: 8	0	

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Certain factors should be noted when interpreting this study's results. The language situation to which these pupils responded may have affected the type of oral English they produced. While looking at a picture depicting some action, the students were asked to construe a story based on the incident being observed. Cazden has proposed that the nature of the task may influence the language produced by children. She considered the topic, the task, and the listener as being critical criteria (Cazden, 1970, pp. 81-101).

It also appears essential to note that during the study, some of the children fell into a higher age bracket. Thus, when the students were reevaluated in April, their performance on the Dos Amigos test was based on their new chronological age. That the children increased in age during the study implies that maturity could have affected the results obtained. The mean ages for the English-taught and the bilingually-taught groups in months were 129 and 120, respectively. Kaluger and Kolson (1969) stated that children may vary in their rate of cognitive development. Some of the children in the English-instructed group may have generally been at a higher stage of cognitive development than those in the bilingually-instructed group. This phenomenon could possibly help explain why the English-instructed group obtained more total wordage than the bilingually-instructed youngsters.

The role of time or years of schooling seems to play an important part when assessing the merits of bilingual instruction. Ramirez stated that in his study the positive effects of bilingual education were not evident until after two or three years of schooling (Ramirez, 1974, p. 118). The fact that the present study was conducted for a five-month period could have affected the results obtained. It is unclear whether the gains obtained by both groups were due to the influence of time or to the effect of bilingual instruction, or perhaps, due to both of these elements.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Because of the limitations of this study, only tentative conclusions seem warranted at this time. It appears that the Peabody Language Development Kit -- Level #3 did help both the English-instructed and the bilingually-instructed youngsters improve their English morphological and syntactical structures to varying degrees. In order to determine the effects of time and of bilingual instruction more accurately, this researcher proposes that a study should be conducted for at least two or three years utilizing each of the three levels of the Peabody Language Development Kits. Since Level 1 is intended for first grade, level 2 for second grade, and level 3 for third grade; the first level should be used the first year, the second level the second year, and the third level the last year. Three groups of first grade Mexican American children who appear to have problems communicating adequately in English should participate in this investigation. One group should be instructed monolingually in English, another bilingually in Spanish and in English, and the third group should receive no instruction in oral language to determine the effect of time on the children's oral language development.

POSSIBLE USEFUL REFERENCES

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Throughout the text of this paper, certain terms are mentioned. This section will define these terms in the context in which they occur.

Morphology refers to the word structure or rules of word building in a language. (Krech, et. al., 1974, p. 120).

Syntax describes the body of linguistic rules that makes it possible to relate a series of words in a sentence to the underlying meaning of that sentence, that is, the rules of ordering of words in a language, or sentence structure. (Krech, et. al. loc. cit.)

Bilingual Education refers to the use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction. One of its axioms is that the best medium for teaching is the mother tongue of the student. This allows the child's education to continue uninterruptedly from home to school, permitting immediate progress in concept building rather than postponing development until the new language has been acquired (Saville and Troike, 1971, pp. 1-3).

T-Unit, or Minimal Terminal Unit, is considered to be one main clause plus any subordinate clause or nonclausal structure attached to it. Thus, the T-Unit refers to a simple or complex sentence, but a compound sentence would be deemed as two or more T-Units. An and or but between two main clauses would always be attached to the second clause, beginning it just as coordinating conjunctions often begin sentences (Hunt, 1965).

The following are examples of T-Units:

Simple Sentence: The knight is on his horse. (One T-Unit)

Complex Sentence: The knight is fighting those men who are wearing red sweaters. (One T-Unit)

Compound Sentence: The knight rode away, but the men with red sweaters went after him. (Two T-Units)